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Contradictory Reports on Responsibility for Beirut Assassinations

During the past week various sources have pointed to several different organizations as having been responsible for the assassination of U.S. Ambassador Francis Meloy, counselor Robert Waring, and driver Zuhayr Mughrabi in Beirut. It is not possible at this stage to determine the accuracy of these reports. (The assassination was described in the 22 June issue.)

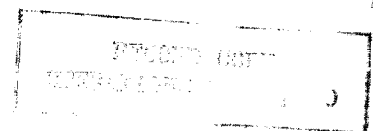
A Lebanese official has stated that Fatah suspects the assassinations were carried out by three to five members of the Lebanese Socialist Revolutionary Organization. This source claimed that contrary to some press reports, Fatah has identified the killers but does not have them in custody. On 23 June, apparently in connection with their investigation, Fatah stormed an office of the SRO located near the Arab University. Three SRO members were killed in the raid and the organization's leader, Murshid Shibbu, fled.

This organization, also known as the Shibbu gang and closely related to the Arab Communist Organization, has a history of anti-American violence and also has attacked other Western personnel and installations. In about July 1975 several activists of the SRO and/or the ACO were arrested in Lebanon, Syria and Kuwait (see the issues of 15 and 29 July 1975), and the group had been dormant since the arrests. However, in early 1976 leftist forces overran the Lebanese prison where several of these terrorists were held, and all of them were released.

Another Lebanese official said that an investigation made by some leftist Lebanese leaders revealed that the ambassador's car was stopped at a roadblock by three young members of a branch of the Socialist Labor Party. They took their captives to their leader, a Palestinian, possibly named 'Umar, who decided that the men should be murdered. At the conclusion of the investigation the assassins were picked up for interrogation. When this is completed a press conference will be called to allow journalists to question the accused and to satisfy themselves that, in fact, they are guilty. The murderers will then be executed.

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In contrast to the apparent spur of the moment actions attributed to the Socialist Labor Party, Iraqi authorities hold that the abduction and murder of Ambassador Meloy and his companions were premeditated and that the perpetrators were responding directly to the orders of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. According to the Iraqis, those involved in the assassinations were alerted as soon as the ambassador's car left the embassy. (~~SECRET/NOFORN/NOCONTRACT~~)

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